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ABSTRACT

This study investigated college students' levels of understanding of texts and reading processes, noting how they changed through a cycle of individual reading and writing followed by classroom comparison of students' responses, text re-reading, and re-writing. The study, which followed 17 students of continuing Italian over 6 weeks, involved phenomenography, hermeneutic pedagogy, second language (L2) reading approaches, and reader response and reception theory. Students repeatedly read a short story, then subsequently read two related short stories by the same author. Personal data gathered via a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester investigated students' background in first language (L1) literature and in other languages and attitudes toward L2 literacy studies. Overall, students with lower literacy competence reached higher levels of understanding of the text after class discussion. Repeated readings were effective in enhancing students' understanding of the text. This was achieved by the "narrow" reading process (focusing very closely on form) and at the same time leading students to link form to meaning and to their reading approach. The repeated reading approach was particularly effective within a hermeneutic pedagogy, focused on students sharing learning approaches and understanding of the text. There were qualitative and quantitative improvements at the group level. (Contains 52 references.) (SM)

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ED 462 002

Levels of understanding of L2 literary texts under repeated readings: Factors contributing to readers' processing of second language literature and their learning outcomes[i]

Introduction

The old debate surrounding literature in L2 curricula still continues. In the last decade empirical studies have emerged focusing on what and how literature contributes to language learning (Maxim 1997, Fecteau 1999, Carroli 2000). A number of papers have discussed L2 pedagogical issues ranging from narrowing the gap between language and literature and lower and upper levels with learner-centred approaches (Bernhardt 1994, Bretz 1990, Kramsch 1985, 1993, Swaffar 1988), to the impact of literary competence and language proficiency on L2 reading (Fecteau 1999). Other papers have investigated the relationship between L2 language competence and reading (Alderson 1984, Carrell 1991) and promoting students' active role in reading L2 literary texts (Paran 2001). More generally, issues of literacy have been investigated by comparing visual and printed texts (Chune & Plass 1996), and voluntary versus instructed reading (Krashen 1993). The broader issue of reading printed pages versus navigating the web has been effectively discussed by Eco and Chartier in an interview published in *La Repubblica* (Regazzoni 1999). Finally, Kramsch and Kramsch (2000) have analyzed articles published in the *Modern Language Journal* from 1916 to 1999 to document the changing role of literature occurred in foreign language teaching, from essentially

FL027152

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aesthetic (1910's) to "an 'authentic' experience of the target culture (1980s-1990s)". At present, as the authors point out, the study and teaching of literature seems to be absent from the *MLJ* (2000:553). Paran (2000) instead has reviewed the latest publication on the teaching of literature. Although there are still publications advising teachers how to teach L2 literature and, as Kramsch and Kramsch (2000) highlight, literature is still present in L2 teaching and learning, there needs to be more research linked to literature published in important journals such as the *MLJ*. Especially, further classroom-based research is needed to clarify the potential roles of literature in the L2 curriculum. though.

This article presents a summary of the results of a study conducted in semester 2, 2000 with 17 students of Continuing Italian 2 (4th semester)[ii] over a period of 6 weeks at the Australian National University. The study was conducted from a mixed perspective, integrating key elements of phenomenography (Marton & Booth 1997)[iii], hermeneutic pedagogy (Luperini 1998, Gadamer 1975), L2 reading approaches (Carrell, Devine & Eskey 1988), and reader response and reception theory (Rosenblatt 1978, 1995, Iser 1972, 1978, Jauss 1982, Gadamer 1975, 1976). Students read three short stories, the first under repeated readings, some individual and some collective. The study investigated students' level of understanding of texts and students' reading processes and how these changed through the cycle of individual reading and writing followed by classroom comparison of students' responses, text re-reading and re-writing. Personal variables were gathered through a questionnaire at the beginning of the semester to help select the texts and to investigate students' background in L1 literature and in other languages as well as their attitude towards L2 literary

studies. This article will focus especially on the different levels of understanding of literary texts and on factors that contributed to change in students' levels.

The objectives of the study were to investigate students' learning processes and strategies over repeated readings of a short story, "La casa bella", and subsequently two related short stories by the same writer. The theoretical framework was provided by phenomenographic studies of L1 learning approaches and L2 'consciousness' raising principles (Schmidt 1993). Phenomenography, a qualitative research paradigm, and consciousness in L2 learning, both emphasize the role of awareness in learning. Phenomenography also stresses the relationship between students' perspectives, approaches to learning, subject matter and learning outcomes (Marton 1975, Marton & Saljo 1976). The repeated reading approach attempted by Halasz (1983) with literary texts in the L1 of the students, yielded results at the individual level as did the following study by Marton, Carlsson and Halasz (1992). The repeated reading approach is not dissimilar to Krashen's notion of "narrow reading" (1981). Students, by reading repeatedly a text pertaining to a specific content area and/or by the same author, build up the vocabulary, syntax (linguistic features) and become aware of the cultural and rhetorical schemata of the author. For students, especially reading in a second language, reading further texts by the same author should therefore become more accessible.

In their 1992 study, Marton, Carlsson and Halasz found a correlation between students' advanced understanding of the text and 'reflective variation' - looking at the text from within to understand its meaning, and shifting one's perspective from reading to reading. Their conclusions were that neither repeated reading alone nor the adoption of a deep rather than surface approach to reading is sufficient to gain an advanced understanding of the text. The students' approach to reading

is necessary as well as their ability to shift their perspectives is necessary (1992:2). When the researchers attempted to 'shape reader awareness' by transferring the 'reflective variation' approach to other students, the experiment had the reverse effect, that is the variation in reading was reduced rather than expanded. They attributed the results to students' focussing too narrowly on the instructions rather than on experiencing the text (Marton, Carlsson & Halasz 1994). It is possible that the results were also due to a strong focus on reflective variation as the 'best' approach, a lack of consideration of personal variables and no shared reading and reflection practices. As will be explained in the method section, the current study was modified to address such issues as well as to adapt Marton et al design to a second language environment.

This study adopted a 'hermeneutic' classroom approach to learning in order to elicit more advanced reading and understanding of the text, by having students contrast and compare their responses (in Italian and English) to the text. This approach was aimed at promoting active reading practices and make reading literary texts an enjoyable, shared learning experience, and ultimately bring about change and empower students to take charge of their reading practices and "own literary meaning" (Paran 2001). Luperini (1998: 13-20) in the chapter entitled "La classe come comunità ermeneutica" (The classroom as a hermeneutic community)[iv] proposes a pedagogic model that opposes the structuralist models of text reading used in Italian education since the Seventies. According to him, 'logotecnocrati' (logotechnocrats) imposed such models ignoring to a large extent new directions in reading and literary theory based on reader-oriented and reception theory focused on the reader and its interaction with the text rather than on the text alone. For Luperini, the structuralist model, focused too strongly on descriptive exercises on the text, is partly to blame if

4

young people have distanced themselves from reading literature. The model he proposes, the class as a hermeneutic community, has the 'inquiring' class as its central aspect. Students, with their attempts to give meaning to the text, also learn to confront, compare, divide and collectively recompose the text[v] and ultimately come closer to 'the pleasure' (Barthes 1973) of reading literary texts. In the section 'Yes, there is a texte (sic) in this class" (1998:17-180), Luperini insists however that the first reading stage should not disregard students'[v] ability (or inability) to read the text effectively (at the structural level). According to him teachers should be first of all intellectuals who pose themselves questions about the meaning and the value of texts and of literary tradition and [that] their greatest ambition should be to transform students into intellectuals (1998:127). He states that the literary text is the only one capable of offering students a path towards learning to respect others' opinions whilst defending their own.[vi] The approach used in this study took Luperini's central idea of the class as a learning community and combined it with Marton's 'reflective variation' and interactive classroom practices. Luperini's model was adapted to the L2 context and to a perspective of L2 that does not separate language from culture or form from content rather, it integrates them focusing on their inextricable bond.

Findings are that repeated readings of a text proved effective in building up students' understanding of the text. This was achieved by the 'narrow' reading process, that is focusing very closely on form, and at the same time, leading students to link form to meaning and also to their reading approach. The repeated reading approach proved especially effective within a hermeneutic pedagogy, focused on learners sharing learning approaches and understanding of the text. There was a qualitative as well as quantitative improvement at the group level. Implications are that explicit

teaching practice focused on content and students' approach to content, and attention to individual variables, is beneficial to students' learning. Using literary texts at the Continuing Level, by the same author, one text under repeated readings, and two related stories later proved particularly useful as it reinforced students' comprehension at the language level as well as at the rhetorical and cultural level. At the same time, implicit instruction served two purposes: to coax students to focus on particular form and content features of the text and to stimulate students' curiosity about the text. As will be suggested at the end of the article, and as the research paradigms discussed earlier, in particular phenomenography and new hermeneutic pedagogy, indicate, educators can adopt particular classroom approaches to promote the class as a hermeneutic community and to make reading literature a valuable and enjoyable learning experience.

Method

Sample

The study was conducted in semester 2, 2000 with 17 students of Continuing Italian (in their 4th semester)[vii] in an authentic learning environment (rather than under strict experimental conditions), over a period of six weeks. All students were female. Their L1 was English and only two spoke an L2 at home, one spoke Italian and one spoke Spanish. Most students indicated in the questionnaire that they had enrolled in Italian mainly because of a general interest in the language or for family reasons. Most students indicated that they read literature in their L1, and a few also in other languages. Some students never or rarely read literature. All agreed (to various degrees) that literary

texts should be included in the L2 curriculum and that these texts enhance their appreciation of the culture as well as their language skills. The students' answers to the questions about the level at which literature should be introduced varied from "all levels" to "only higher levels". Most students agreed that it should be included at all levels. Novels and short stories were the preferred types of texts. The main concerns that emerged in the open questions involved especially the difficulty of texts, (including background and context, but especially linguistic difficulty) and level of engagement with the text. Engagement with the text was associated with "well written"["], "interesting", and enjoyable literature. As in the previous study, conducted in 1999, students heavily relied on the ability of the author to keep them absorbed, rather than on their own ability to 'construct' the text. As a consequence, instruction focused also on developing more active reading strategies.

Procedure

Students read the first two paragraphs of "La casa bella" (Primo Racconto del Viaggiatore)[viii] by Stefano Benni. Under the two paragraphs students had a photocopy of the drawing on the cover of the collection of short stories entitled *L'ultima lacrima* (Benni, 1994): a modern family 'glued' to a television set. Students individually read the two paragraphs and answered questions on the content (mainly inferencing about story outcome) and their approach to reading the text. In their replies students were required to write the first 150 words in Italian and had the option of writing the rest of

their answers in English. Instructions were provided in Italian with an English translation in brackets. Instructions to all tasks were intentionally aimed at helping students to notice the links between syntax, lexicon and meaning as well as links with other texts read and students' background. Instructions were as implicit as possible. Instructions were implicit since they coaxed students into finding those links by themselves first[ix], and secondly by comparing and contrasting their answers to those of other students, then rereading the text, then writing again about the text and about their approach and perspectives.

This cycle of individual reading and writing, followed by classroom reflection[x] on variation of understanding, perspective and approach, followed by re-reading and re-writing, was repeated for the first short story over 4 weeks. The teacher then gave an interactive presentation[xi] of the First "Racconto" and distributed the second and third "Racconto" ("L'uomo puntuale" and "L'inferno"). Students had already read the first paragraph of "L'inferno" for a second inferencing task included in a mid-semester test. Students had only one hour together to quickly read and discuss their understanding of the two new texts and link them to the first one. The teacher coaxed students into making intertextual links and links with the Italian literary tradition (another *Inferno*?) that would help them gain an advanced understanding of the three short stories and prepare for the final written classroom task in the last week of the semester. The table below shows the main cycles of the study:

Table 2 – Process cycles	List of Task/s
Pre process (week 4)	Questionnaire
Cycle 1 (weeks 9-10)	Repeated readings of the beginning of "La casa bella" and inferencing on story content and outcome (Home) Students' responses: Reflection and discussion; Re-writing (Class)
Cycle 2 (week 10-11)	Repeated readings of the entire short story (class+home) Class reflection on differences and similarities in students' responses to the text. Individual written activity: write everything you recall about the text and your readings of the text
Cycle 3 (week 11-12)	Interactive teacher's presentation on three texts (Class + further reflection at home) Individual reading of the second and third "Racconto del Viaggiatore" (class + home)
Cycle 4 (week 13)	Classroom written assignment on three short stories and evaluation of Reading and writing project by students

Analysis of data

At the beginning of the semester a Questionnaire was administered and analyzed to establish students' variables such as reasons for studying Italian, attitudes to the study of literature in L2, literary background in L1 and their perception of 'enjoyable' literature. This data was used for selecting the texts and prepare the instructions for the tasks, and will also be used to establish possible relationships between variables such as extensive free reading and advanced understanding of texts.

The main data used for describing students' understanding of the text and their approach to the text is constituted by students' individual written answers while the data used for monitoring change is constituted by students' written tasks after classroom reflection and discussion. Conclusions about change in students' understanding of the text were drawn after the cycle of repeated readings. Conclusions about changes in students' approach to reading literature and how these were linked to perspective and qualitative and quantitative variation, were based on data collected during the last classroom task about the three short stories.

The analysis of the data was conducted following phenomenographic parameters (as in Marton et al 1994) and content analysis methods (as in Halasz 1982). A preliminary analysis of the data was undertaken at each stage of the study so that the instructions for the following cycle could be modified if necessary. Firstly the aim was to establish qualitative differences in the way students made inferences about the outcome of the story and linked them to their personal variables and their approach to reading. Then these differences and similarities in students were used by selecting and pasting students' answers and ask them to read their responses in the classroom and underline why and how the answers were similar or different. Students thus also participated in setting up a pyramid of levels of understanding (linked to perspective and approach). This method is consistent with a hermeneutic approach to teaching and research and phenomenographic principles for teaching and learning.

Summary of findings

The following categories of description summarise the variation in ways of understanding the text before (1) and in their re-writing activity after classroom reflection, discussion of students' responses to the text and their reading approaches (2).

Differences in inferencing 1&2

Most of the students produced appropriate inferences on the text outcome. Only one student produced an 'inappropriate' hypothesis. This was not due to miscues in comprehension but rather to naïve schemata and lack of appropriate rhetorical and literary schemata.[xii] The difference in the responses was determined by how students read and were able to form their inferences. Some students were able to quickly construct an appropriate outcome because of their literary competence in L1 and their familiarity with narrative structures and universal themes. However, especially when high literary competence was combined with low language competence, interaction with the text was minimal, so was the ability to link form to meaning. Interestingly, some students with low literary competence and low to medium language competence, concentrated strongly on form at first and were better able to link their hypothesis with parts of the text. They however gained an insight into the underlying themes, use of narrative voice and irony only after the classroom task.

Differences in understanding the whole story 1 & 2

As for the first task, students with lower literary competence reached a higher level of understanding of the text after the classroom discussion. However, some of the students with low literary competence, were able to make the most interesting cross-cultural links between Benni's narrator

being forced to abandon his beautiful house, as outlined earlier, and land and Australian Aborigines being forced off the land, as well as the plight of Australian farmers. During classroom reflection, tensions developed between such 'personal' readings, based on background experience and knowledge of one's own cultural world, and strictly text-based readings based on the notion of author's intention. Classroom reflection and discussion on reading and interpretation, mediated by the teacher, focused on the importance of relating unknown texts to one's knowledge of the world, to be able to make sense of them, especially initially. It was also stressed that readers should be able to justify and defend their own statements about the text with elements internal to the text. Culturally though, parallels could be drawn between very different societies as the themes treated are universal. In this sense, a strict understanding of literary competence, exclusively text-based rather than reader-based, narrowed the scope and interpretation of the texts read.

Differences in linking the three short stories

The highest level was achieved by four students who were able to use their pre-existing literary competence, incorporate in their reading approach elements from other students' processes and perspectives as well as re-shape the teacher's input and make intertextual links to strengthen their written analysis. This means that they used all elements at their disposal and also that they shifted their perspective and approach in order to reach a higher level of understanding. Although the teacher's input was minimal, the four students picked up essential points, such as the parallel structure of Benni's stories and Dante's *Divina Commedia*, that enabled them to link their comparison to literary tradition and cultural changes within Italy. These students also showed

greater improvement in their written ability. Another three students were able to reach a higher level of understanding by comparing the three texts read to other texts read during the year and thus placing the Benni's story within the cultural framework of the changes that occurred in Italy from WW2 onwards. The remaining students (10) succeeded in identifying the basic elements connecting the three short stories but were not as successful in linking their analysis to other texts read, they also made limited use of information provided by the teacher. The result was still an improvement in terms of text understanding and written competence. It is likely that the their text understanding improved because of the repeated reading of the first story and the classroom discussion which either confirmed one's hypotheses about the text or allowed for expansion through dialogue. The following two stories were 'easier' because they were narratively related to the first one and because the students were by then acquainted with the writer's style and use of irony.

Qualitative and quantitative changes

At the group level there was an 'evolution' in students' ability to understand literary texts as well as an increased ability to read longer texts and write longer responses. This was greater than would normally be expected within a six-week period and without the repeated readings of the texts and the focused reinforcement activities. Students' learning outcomes were due to several factors including the development of more effective reading approaches, focussing on analytical interpretation of texts. This in turn could be attributed to an increased ability to notice syntactic and semantic clues related to meaning as well as an understanding of the author's rhetorical strategies (irony, naïve narrator's voice). There was also in the most advanced students a development in the

ability to link the texts to other texts and to the Italian literary tradition. Overall students confidence in their ability to read literary texts and their written proficiency improved substantially.

At the language level, students had the opportunity to focus on reading short texts and carry out specific written and oral tasks. The questions were in Italian with the English translation and contained vocabulary that students could use in their replies. This allowed students to immediately access words they did not know and use them in their writing. The project was intensive and focused and stimulated students' curiosity. These features may in turn have stimulated many students to write more than the required amount of words in Italian in their responses. A marked improvement in their written expression could also be attributed to factors such as focused topics, repeated readings and writings, shared learning environment. Another reason could be the way assessment was split, initially more weight was given to content (70%) and less to form (30%) to encourage students to focus on content. Gradually the form percentage was increased to 50% for the last class assignment, which was also the longest and the most accurate in terms of form and content. It appears that as students' confidence about the text increased, the confidence in their own ability to read and write a certain amount of words, also increased. Their accuracy also improved; this underlines the link between performance and motivation.

At the individual level there were still discrepancies in the way students read and understood texts. This was due to different factors: from very low literary competence at the beginning of the semester combined with low language competence or to high literary competence and low language competence. Although it is unlikely that all students could reach the same level, it is foreseeable that a more extended 'treatment' (at least a semester), would produce even better results.

The relationship between understanding and reading approach

There was definitely a relationship between students' answers and their reading approaches. Overall, as already found in a previous study (Carroli 2001), students who adopted an interactive approach to reading by shifting their focus from form to content and back to form, linking the text with their previous experience and also to universal narrative themes and structures, achieved a higher understanding of the texts. This seems to confirm Marton & Booth's (1997) concept that 'variation' in text understanding is necessary if an advanced understanding of the complexity of texts is to be achieved. It also underlines the importance of linking form and meaning, of basing one's assumptions about meaning on text features. If these relationships are perhaps obvious to some teachers and researchers, and even some students either consciously or subconsciously, they are by no means adopted and put into practice by all students. Certainly there can be as many different readings as there are readers (Borges, 1949, Calvino 1979, Marton 1997)[xiii], not all readings are however 'plausible' as Culler points out (1978). The role of L2 educators is to strive to set learning situations conducive to higher quality learning, this must take into account students' perceptions of the learning situation, their awareness of the object of learning, in this case literary texts, and awareness of the difference in students' readings. At the same time, students' prior experience and approaches to learning, in this case reading literary texts in a second language, must emerge in classroom discussion and provide a valuable source for change.

Discussion

Which were the factors that contributed to change? Personal variables, including affective variables such as reasons for studying Italian, attitudes to literary studies and definition of 'enjoyable' literature, gathered before the study, were helpful in gaining an insight into students' background and preferences which in turn was extremely useful for selecting the texts. The simultaneous emphasis on content and approach, and the subsequent comparison in class made students notice the importance of relating parts of the texts (syntax, lexicon, or the beginning) to understand the whole meaning. Reflection on variation, differences in reading texts expanded students' awareness of different approaches to reading literature, also increased the awareness and acceptance of different views. Discussion about difference as well as discovering similarity provided a sense of confidence in one's own ability to read and interpret literary texts in L2.

Based on students' written feedback, the class discussions were very useful, especially the focus on different reading approaches. The instructions provided elicited overall a change in students' ability to read deeply (read for meaning) and in the best examples, to make links between form, culture and literary devices. A very important role was played by the first task (inferencing the story outcome by reading the first two paragraphs and linking them to the book cover). This task brought to the fore the active role readers play when beginning a text (reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game" Goodman 1967) (a role that nevertheless goes unnoticed if we have the whole short story). In their last written metalinguistic and literary reflections on the cycles of sequenced activities, students found the inferencing task challenging for two main reasons, unfamiliarity with the author's writing style and also with this type of exercise. Most students however found it very useful because it forced them to "work things out from the context", and also "to focus on the art of

the writer" and look very closely at vocabulary and structures to work out the meaning of the opening of the story. Students also found the activity very exciting because they had the opportunity to construct, as it were, the rest of the text. Their comments about the cyclic approach indicate that the focus on reading-writing-reflection forced them to scrutinize the text and to think creatively. The approach also increased students' confidence in their ability to read literature in Italian and write about literature in Italian. One student very honestly admitted that if the teacher had started by giving a lecture on the texts, she would not have given it "much attention and effort".

Implications

Explicit teaching practices aimed at developing students' awareness of links between text understanding, perspectives and approaches to reading, as well as links within the texts between form and meaning, and literary competence are necessary to develop language and cultural links, literary and cultural schemata links, the importance of intertextual links. Explicit practice is also needed to make students reflect and compare their own reading approaches and their understanding of the texts. Implicit instructions that coax students into discovering the text are also essential for motivation and attention. Finally, a shared learning environment, where students take charge of their learning, proved conducive to change.

Conclusions

Change in students' reading and understanding of texts occurred by turning the classroom into a learning community with practices aimed at promoting awareness in learners. To use this approach 'informed' teacher flexibility is essential. Educators, by linking their knowledge of L2 reading theory, literary theory and pedagogical theory to their experience as practitioners and to students' personal variables, can choose appropriate literary texts and shape instructions to empower students and to make reading literature a shared learning experience. The question that remains to be investigated is: how can students with less effective reading approaches progress and literary competence even further? Longer studies, over a semester or a year are needed to establish whether it reaches a plateau or whether the improvement would continue.

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[i] This article is a reworking of a paper presented at AAAL (American Association of Applied Linguistics) Convention 2001 in St. Louis, USA entitled "Levels of understanding of L2 literary text under repeated readings: Factors contributing to readers' processing of second language literature and their learning outcomes. The study reported in the paper and the article is part of a doctoral thesis on "The possible roles of literature in L2 learning and teaching" (still in progress). I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Roger Hillman and my advisors, Ms Gerlese Akerlind and Prof. Liddicoat for their useful suggestions.

[ii] In Australia, the second semester begins in the middle of July and ends at the end of October. Students enrolled in Italian Studies-Continuing 2 have either done three semesters of Italian at university, starting as complete beginners, or have had some previous experience with the language, for example three years of high school, or an intensive course in Italy.

[iii] Marton defines phenomenography as "the empirical study of the limited number of qualitatively different ways in which we experience, conceptualise, understand, perceive, apprehend etc., various phenomena in and aspects of the worldaround us. These differing experiences, understandings etc., are characterised in terms of categories of description, logically related to each other, and forming hierarchies in relation to given criteria. Such an ordered set of categories of description is called the outcome space of the phenomenon [...] (Marton, 1992 quoted in Prosser and Trigwell 1999: 121).

[iv] The model is based on Hans George Gadamer whom Luperini defines as the founder of "new" hermeneutics and especially on the his text *Truth and method* originally published in Germany in 1960.

[vi] Solo il testo letterario offre l'esperienza dello spessore e della pluralita' dei significati, e insegna cosi' che la verita' e' relativa, storica, processuale: un percorso interdialogico che avviene attraverso il contributo di tutti. (1998: 15). [Only the literary text offers the experience of the thickness/multilayered and the plurality of values, and teaches thus that truth is relative, historical, processual: an interdialogic journey that happens with the contribution of all].[vi]

[viii] The first story in the trilogy begins with a description of the beautiful house in which the narrator used to live when he was young. The perfect picture of life in the countryside is gradually corrupted by inside dangers and outside pressures – especially the overwhelming influence of the media. At the end of the story, the protagonist leaves because the 'beautiful house' is no more. Paradise is lost. The descent towards hell begins.

[ix] For example: Read the whole short story. Does this short story remind you of anything you have read before or anything that has happened to you? Please provide some examples. Were you acquainted with the themes, lexicon and grammatical structures of the story? Please provide examples and links. Briefly describe in detail the reading strategies you used when reading the short story (Class Exercise 2). These instructions helped students to focus on specific components internal to the story and relate them to external aspects such as background personal experience, previous acquaintance with similar topics explored during the year. The research question was to explore whether students would make the connections to reach a better understanding of the story.

[x] During classroom reflection students, subdivided into groups, read and discussed sections of their replies, previously collated by the teacher, to become aware of differences and similarities in their responses to the text and their approach to reading.

[xi] Interactive presentation in this context meant that it was not a lecture in the traditional sense, that is presented entirely by the teacher, instead, students, solicited by the teacher participated with their individual responses to formulate a collective competent reading of the three texts. The teacher, rather than presenting the students with facts, focused, with the students, on constituent parts of the tale, in particular lexical items and grammatical features to highlight the inextricable connection between form and meaning, and between style, narrative structure and literary tradition. The classroom became the site for reflection, guessing and discovery, dialogue and if necessary, variation.

[xii] The issue of literary competence will be discussed in depth in the doctoral thesis. As Culler points out, to read a text as literature is not to make one s mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of literary discourse which tells one what to look for. Anyone lacking this knowledge [ ] would be unable to read it *as* literature (1975: 113-114). This is precisely what the student who produced the inappropriate

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inference did, she read the text with innocent eyes, as if it were not literature. In any other text perhaps the association between food and countryside would equate to a beautiful banquet at the end - not this literary text. The student in this case missed what Culler calls the primary convention of literature which is the rule of significance which allows the reader to make the connections between the words in the text and what they represent within the text, symbolically. Another two conventions necessary in order to read the *incipit* of La casa bella were the conventions of metaphorical coherence and thematic unity (115). In other words, the student lacked the instruments for reading the text as literature. The hermeneutic class provided the possibility to understand how literary texts work at a structural level to allow all students firstly to understand how to read literature, secondly, to interpret the text and place it in relation to a particular cultural and literary tradition as well as universal values that are inter-cultural. Within this approach, Structuralist principles cooperate with a new Hemeneutic approach to reading literature.

[xiii] In a metaphorical sense the group of readers can be thought of as a prism through which the text passed, to be refracted and to exit in distinctly different meanings (Marton & Booth 1997: 150).